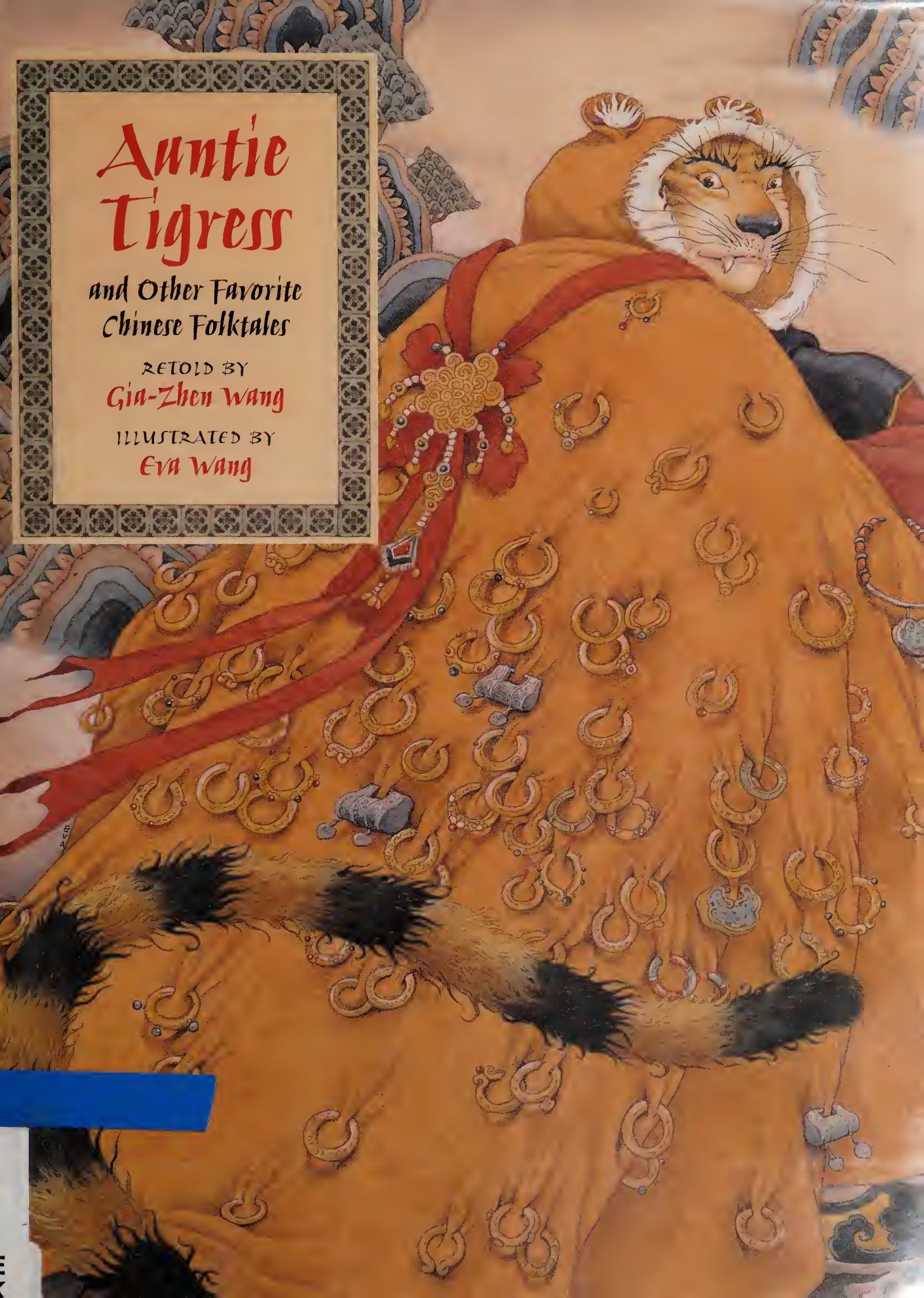
Auntie Tigress
and Other Favorite Chinese Folktales
RETOLD BY
Gia-Zhen Wang
ILLUSTRATED BY
Eva Wang

High up in the mountains lived an old, old Tigress who had been on Earth for so long that she had mastered the art of transforming herself into an old lady.

The Tigress was sly and cunning. She had long sharp teeth and, when she was hungry, she would come down from the mountains to prey on people. She was especially fond of tender, juicy children.

So begins the first story in this collection of three favorite Chinese folktales. With echoes of *Baba Yaga* and *Little Red Riding Hood*, this suspenseful tale tells how Auntie Tigress finally meets her match when a kindhearted little girl—with some help from a mouse and three magic sachets—vanquishes the ferocious Tigress, who retreats to the highest mountains, ending her reign of terror for five hundred years.

In the second story, a hardworking and generous fisherman outwits an arrogant, greedy tycoon. And in the final tale, a Cinderella story, a foolish father discovers that the most valuable gifts are not always the most costly.

This beautifully illustrated volume, rich with fascinating details, is the perfect introduction to the folklore of China.

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and Other Favorite Chinese Folktales

RETOLD BY
Gia-Zhen Wang

ILLUSTRATED BY
Eva Wang

TRANSLATED BY
ANNIE KUNG

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Auntie Tigress

High up in the mountains lived an old, old Tigress who had been on Earth for so long that she had mastered the art of transforming herself into an old lady.

The Tigress was sly and cunning. She had long sharp teeth, and when she was hungry, she would come down from the mountains to prey on people. She was especially fond of tender, juicy children.

After she had gobbled up a child, she would collect, as a trophy, the child's golden locket, pendant, bracelet, or earrings. The Tigress decorated her immense cape with these souvenirs. She loved the clinging, clanging sounds they made as she stomped through the mountains. They seemed to say to the world, "Here comes the Tigress, the greatest child-eating monster of all!"

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EVA

One day, the Tigress was hungry and headed down the mountains to find a plump little child for dinner. She came to a house at the foot of a hill and hid behind a tree.

A mother called to her daughter, "MeiMei, my sweet girl, I'm taking your father his dinner. He needs to finish harvesting the crops. Your great-aunt from over the mountain is coming to stay with you. I left some buns in the kitchen for you to share."

"I've never met Great-aunt," said MeiMei. "How will I know it's her?"

"She will call you by name," said her mother. "And she is bringing you a pair of pretty red shoes. Be good. Stay inside and lock the doors," she added, and hurried on her way.

The Tigress drooled at the sight of lovely MeiMei and the shiny golden locket she wore around her neck. She raced to the door, but MeiMei had already locked it, just as she'd been told.

"That MeiMei is a clever girl," grumbled the Tigress. "But I'll get her to open that door."

The Tigress hid in the bushes and waited until she heard MeiMei's great-aunt coming up the path. Then the Tigress leaped up and let out a ferocious roar! Poor Great-aunt was so frightened that she fainted.

The Tigress tied Great-aunt to a tree and quickly transformed herself into an old woman. She picked up the satchel with the pair of pretty red shoes in it and hurried back to MeiMei's house.

"Open the doors, my dear," she called in through the window.

"Who are you?" asked MeiMei.

"Why, I am your great-aunt," the Tigress replied.

MeiMei peered at her closely. "Mother said that Great-aunt would know my name and would bring me a gift."

"Oh, yes," said the Tigress, opening the satchel. "Look, MeiMei, I brought you a pair of pretty red shoes. Now be a good girl and let me in."

Relieved that this was indeed her great-aunt, MeiMei unlocked the doors.

MeiMei led Auntie Tigress into the kitchen and offered her some of the delicious buns. The Tigress was not interested in eating one. It was MeiMei that she wanted! Just to win her trust, the Tigress reached for a bun anyway. But when she saw a little mouse on the plate she fell to the floor, cowering in terror. Who could have imagined that of all the creatures on Earth, the mighty Tigress feared only mice.

MeiMei burst out laughing. "Oh, Great-aunt, how can you be afraid of a little mouse?"

Furious and embarrassed, the Tigress picked up a long bamboo stick and waved it at the mouse.

Speedy, nimble mouse! He jumped up and down and left and right and finally ducked into one of MeiMei's new red shoes.

"Now I've got you!" cried the Tigress as she raised the stick to strike him.

MeiMei wanted to save the poor little creature. "Stop! Don't ruin my new red shoes!" she said, distracting the Tigress long enough for the mouse to scamper out of the house.

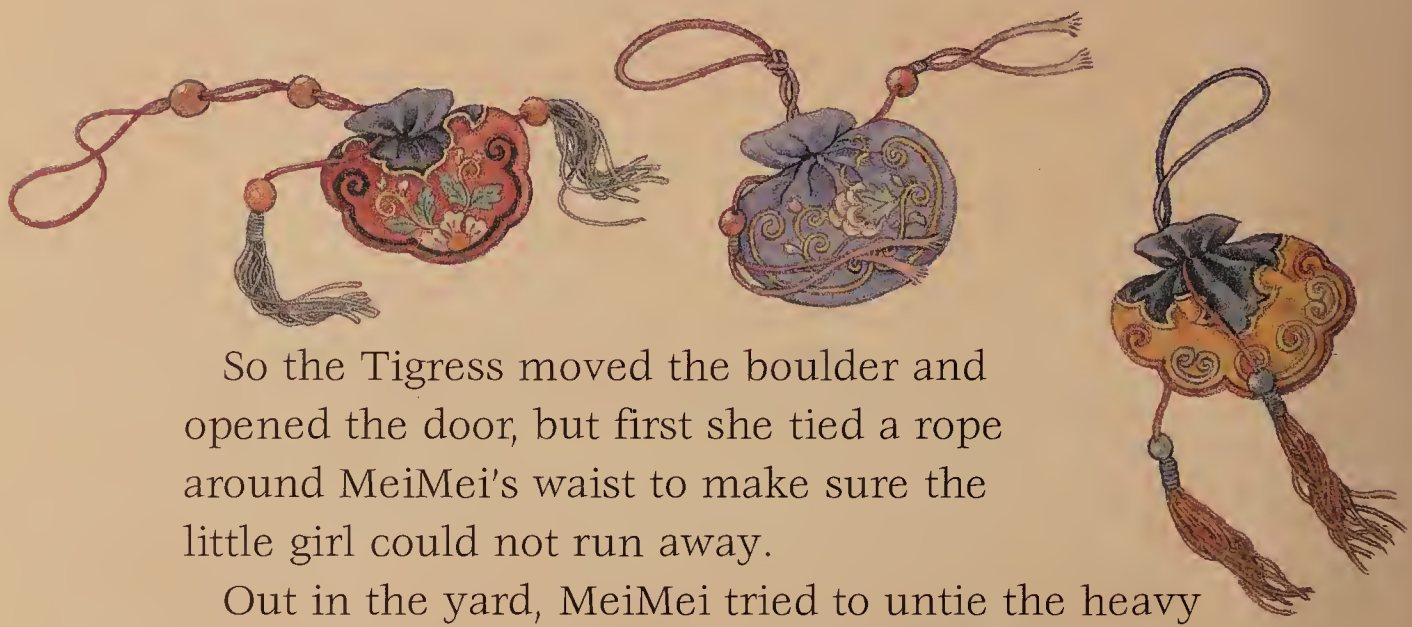
The Tigress was furious about the mouse's escape and she stomped and screamed. When she did, MeiMei caught a glimpse of a tail peeking out from under the Tigress's long skirt.

EVA

Then Auntie Tigress went into the bedroom and called to MeiMei, "Come and take a nap with me."

Now that MeiMei knew Great-aunt was really a Tigress, she wasn't going near her! "First let me try on my new red shoes," she said, and she quickly put on the shoes and headed for the door. But the Tigress had blocked it with a boulder, and MeiMei could not open the door.

The Tigress again called for MeiMei to join her in the bedroom. MeiMei thought for a moment and replied, "I need to go to the outhouse first."



So the Tigress moved the boulder and opened the door, but first she tied a rope around MeiMei's waist to make sure the little girl could not run away.

Out in the yard, MeiMei tried to untie the heavy rope, but her hands were too small and delicate to loosen the knots. As she sat crying in frustration, a little mouse crawled out of a basket and started gnawing at the rope. It was the very mouse that MeiMei had rescued!

Soon MeiMei was free! The mouse thanked her for saving his life and gave her three little sachets. But before he could tell MeiMei what they were for, the Tigress came charging out of the house, sending MeiMei and the mouse scurrying away.

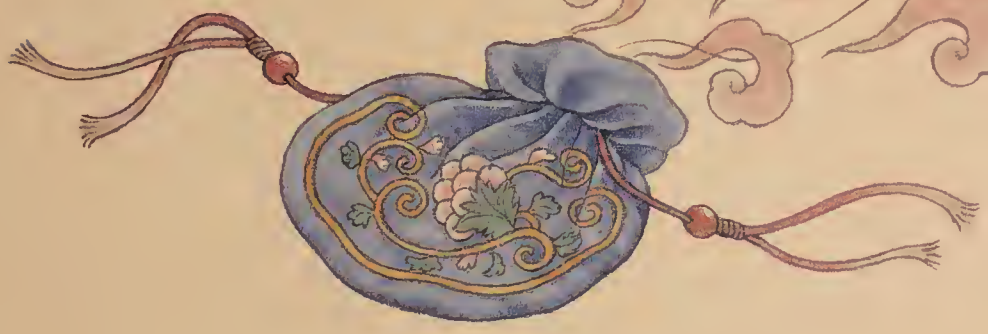
MeiMei ran into the bamboo forest. Her steps were much smaller than the Tigress's huge strides and, in no time at all, the Tigress was upon her. As she looked over her shoulder at the fierce creature, MeiMei tripped and dropped the red sachet.

A little red bean rolled out of the bag, bounced three times, and suddenly turned into hundreds of red beans that rolled all over the ground.

When the Tigress stepped on them, she slipped and fell with a loud *thud*. She landed so hard that a few of her teeth were jarred loose. As the Tigress roared in pain, MeiMei ran away, her footsteps taunting the Tigress.

The Tigress got up, gritted her loose teeth, and raced after MeiMei.

When she caught up to her, MeiMei was less afraid, for now she knew that the mouse's sachets were magical. She opened the blue sachet and threw it behind her. One slender sewing needle flew out of the bag,



twirled in the air, and turned into hundreds of needles. The needles instantly burrowed into the ground and sprouted into plants that looked like soft peacock feathers—but were as sharp as needles.

As the Tigress ran through the feathery plants, they pricked her all over and she fell to the ground, writhing in pain.

MeiMei kept running, her footsteps taunting the Tigress once again.

As she pulled the sharp feathers out of her feet, the Tigress swore to catch MeiMei and gobble her up!

Once again the Tigress caught up to the little girl quickly, but, just as she reached out to grab her, MeiMei opened the golden sachet and tossed it over her shoulder.

A fine golden hair wafted out and turned into hundreds of mice with golden fur. The mice swarmed over the Tigress, quickly covering her from head to toe. Roaring in fear, the Tigress turned and raced back to the mountains.

Indeed, she was so terrified of the mice that she did not show her face for five hundred years!

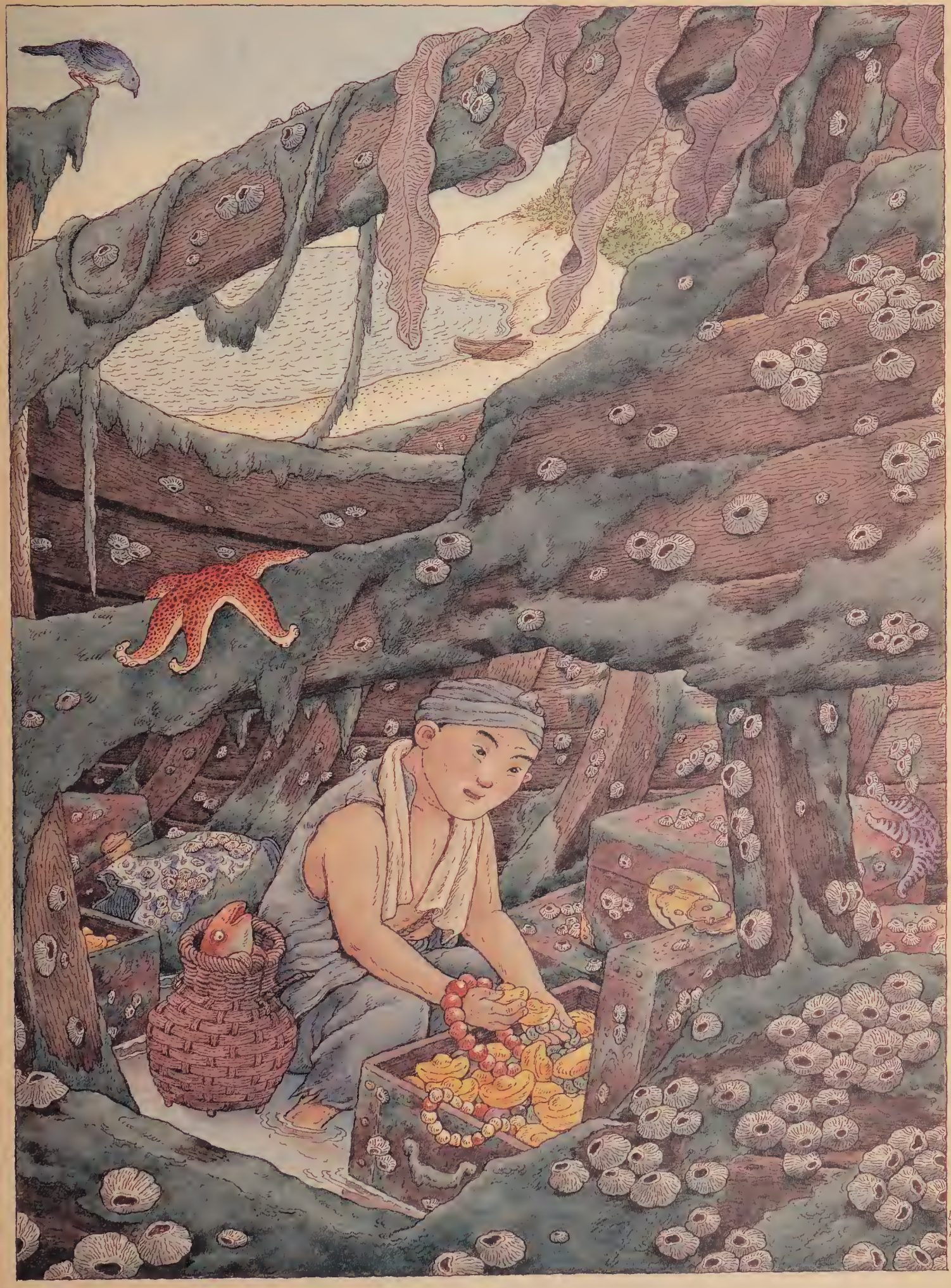
MeiMei ran out of the bamboo forest and met her mother, who was hurrying home along the path. They untied Great-aunt and helped her back to the house. Before long, MeiMei's father finished the harvest and returned home, too, and they all lived happily ever after.

The Fisherman and the Tycoon

In a village by the sea, a young fisherman named Chang San worked hard to support himself and his mother.

One day while out fishing, Chang San was caught in a terrible storm. The waves tossed his little boat up and down and all about. Chang San gripped the sides and held on tightly. He prayed that he would not be swept away in the raging sea. Finally, the roaring surf hurled his boat onto the beach of a deserted island.

Chang San stayed on the island until the storm was over. When the sun finally came out, Chang San discovered an old shipwreck on the beach. In the ship's hold, Chang San found many chests filled with treasure—precious jewelry and gold. Finders keepers, he thought.



Chang San was rich! He built a house, married a fine woman, bought a fleet of oxcarts, and went into business for himself. He shipped local fish and specialties out of town and brought back valuable rice, produce, timber, and herbs. Chang used the money he made to set up shops in other port cities and grew even wealthier.

Most of the land in the village was owned by a man named Lu who had always been the richest tycoon in town until Chang San became wealthy. This filled Lu with a jealous rage. Whenever he heard the villagers gossiping about Chang's wealth—wondering whether Chang or Lu was richer—Lu would rant and storm in fury. "Chang San! A lowly fisherman! A nobody! How could anyone compare him to me?"

Chang's fleet of oxcarts traveled up and down the cobblestone roads in the village, carrying goods in and out of town. The wheels of the carts went clickety-clack over the rough stones. This was music to Chang's ears but unbearable noise to Lu—a constant reminder of the growing wealth of his new rival.

One night, Lu ordered his servants to build a stone wall to block the oxcarts' passage.

Chang protested, "This is a village road. How can you keep it for yourself?"

Lu replied, "I own the land on both sides of the road and I will not let you pass."

Unable to reason with Lu, Chang decided to bring the matter before the village magistrate. But the magistrate, not wanting to offend either of the rich men, asked them to find a way to settle things on their own.

EVA

Lu was blinded by his jealousy and pride. "Let us settle this with a contest," he declared. "Whoever proves that he has the most gold wins."

"All right," said Chang. "But how will we determine that?"

"We will each bring all our gold to Roaring Bay," declared Lu. "Then we'll toss the pieces of gold into the ocean one by one. Whoever runs out of gold first loses the contest—and his fortune!"

Chang hesitated. "That is foolish. The waters of Roaring Bay are deep and the eddies many. Once we toss in the gold, it will be lost forever. The gold could be put to much better use."

"Those are my terms," insisted Lu. "Refuse and you must admit defeat and never use my road again!"

Chang smiled. He had an idea. "All right," he said. "Let us hold the contest in three days."

Chang San hurried off. He set about gathering rocks—trunk after trunk full of rocks. Then he carefully wrapped the rocks in golden foil.

On the day of the contest, Lu and Chang arrived at the cliffs above Roaring Bay. Their servants trailed after them, pulling carts piled high with heavy trunks.

Lu began by tossing one piece of precious gold into the sea and Chang followed with a fake one.

The villagers gathered around to witness the spectacle. They let out a cry every time a shiny piece of gold hit the water and sank beneath the waves. The contest lasted until sundown. Lu dropped the last piece of gold off the cliff and ordered his servant to go home for more.

"There are no more, master," said the servant. "All your wealth is gone."

In despair, Lu stared across the cliff at Chang, who still had many trunks of gold left, and bowed his head in defeat.

Lu was forced to tear down the stone wall and once again open the road to the clickety-clack of Chang's oxcarts. Chang's business grew and grew and so did his fortune. He used his wealth to pave the roads, repair the bridges, and set up schools and scholarships for the poor. He became a legend in the village, known by all as Wise Chang, and he and his family lived happily ever after.

EVA

The Greatest Treasure

Master Liu was a rich and powerful man. He had three daughters: Damei, Amei, and Yomei. Damei and Amei were greedy and vain. They both married wealthy men and lived luxurious and wasteful lives.

The youngest daughter, Yomei, was kind and loving. She was Master Liu's favorite, and he wanted to find her a husband who was even wealthier than her sisters'.

"What about Mr. Wang? He has a great fortune," Master Liu asked.

"No, Father, I'm not interested," Yomei replied. "He made his fortune dishonestly."

Master Liu tried again. "Mr. Woo then. He is a man of influence. What about him?"

"He is a notorious cheat. I'm afraid not," said Yomei.

Master Liu would not give up. "Mr. Zeng. He owns half the island."

"He bullies his tenants. He is not for me," Yomei declared firmly.

"None of these rich and powerful men catches your fancy? What kind of husband *do* you have in mind?" Master Liu asked testily.

"Wealth and power are not important, Father. I want to marry someone who is kind and hardworking."

EVA

Yomei's words stung her father to the core. Hurt and angry, he shouted at Yomei, "Fine, then I will marry you off to a penniless nobody!"

Just then Master Liu heard a street peddler chanting, "Snails, snails, delicious snails!" He summoned the peddler and asked, "What is your name? Are you married?"

The man replied, "My name is Tian Lee, but everyone calls me Peddler Lee. I'm so poor that no woman would ever marry me."

Master Liu pointed to Yomei and said, "My silly daughter loves penniless fools. You may take her home and marry her."

Peddler Lee could not believe his good fortune. He left behind a whole bushel of snails as a gift for his new father-in-law and happily took Yomei home with him.

Yomei found that Lee was a hardworking, kind, and devoted man. Together, they struggled to make a living but were quite content.

One day when Peddler Lee went into the fields to look for snails, a rabbit scampered past him and disappeared into a cave. Lee followed the rabbit and discovered piles of shiny black rocks inside. He thought he would take a few home to show to Yomei, but just then an old man appeared. It was the God of Earth.

"You may take one," he said. "These belong to D.K. Lee who will come one day to claim them. I am their guardian until the prophecy is fulfilled."

Lee nodded respectfully and took just one.

When Lee showed the rock to Yomei, she said, "Why, this is black gold! People use it to warm their houses. It is very valuable."

Lee sighed, "This D.K. Lee is fortunate to own such a treasure."

Yomei rested her head on Lee's shoulder and said, "The greatest treasure is happiness and money can't buy that. We have each other and we are contented."

EVA

A year later, Yomei had a baby boy. She and Lee brought the baby to visit Master Liu. They asked him to name the baby. Master Liu was still angry with Yomei and disdainful of Lee, but when he laid eyes on his only grandson, his heart melted. He carried the baby all around the house, showing him all sorts of toys and precious jewels, but the baby paid no attention until Master Liu showed him the front door knockers. How the baby loved them! He reached out to grab them, giggling in delight.

"Oh, you silly baby!" said Master Liu. "You're just like your mother. You prefer door knockers to fancy toys and precious jewels. Very well then, I'll name you Door Knocker Lee . . . Door Knocker . . . D.K. Lee for short!"

Yomei and Lee stared at each other in astonishment. They remembered the words of the Earth God and realized their baby was the rightful owner of all the black gold!

EVA

Lee and Yomei carried D.K. back to the cave. This time, the old man showed up and smiled at them, saying, "The prophecy has been fulfilled."

There was so much black gold, it would have taken years to move it all home. Yomei and Lee were not greedy. They kept a small pile in their yard and used the black gold to warm their house.

One day a merchant from the mainland passed by and saw the pile of black gold. When he learned of the piles still in the cave, he immediately offered to buy it all, paying with many pieces of gold.

Yomei and Lee were rich, but they remained frugal and used their new fortune to fix the leak in their roof, fill up the rice bin, and buy sturdy new baskets for carrying the snails that Lee sold. They were also generous, quietly donating food to the poor and contributing money to repair bridges and roads in town.

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Another year passed. On the second day of the Chinese New Year, Lee, Yomei, and D.K. visited Master Liu, taking along some pieces of gold as a gift. Since they didn't want to appear showy, they packed the gold at the bottom of Lee's baskets, then piled snails on top.

When they arrived, Yomei's sisters and their husbands were already there. They had brought Master Liu elegant, expensive gifts and began to ridicule Yomei and Lee for their humble and very smelly offering.

Master Liu was also annoyed. Yomei's sisters were dressed in their finest gowns, but Yomei wore a plain old dress. "No wonder her sisters pick on her," he grumbled.

After a sumptuous New Year's banquet, the family sat around the table and chatted. Damei and Amei's husbands bragged about their wealth, trying to top one another

"I'm tired of being a landlord. It's such a burden to own so much land," said one.

"Yes indeed!" replied the other. "It's quite exhausting. I wish I could sell it all, put my feet up, and relax."

Lee spoke up. "You don't want your land anymore? I would gladly buy it."

The two men thought this was very funny and decided to play along with the foolish peddler. They drew up a contract and asked Master Liu to be the witness. They even offered to sell for half-price and sat back waiting for Lee to make a fool of himself.

To their astonishment, Lee removed the snails from the top of his baskets and poured the gold onto the table. The two brothers-in-law could not believe their eyes! "How can this be?" they cried. "Where did Lee get so much money?" They wrung their hands and moaned, filled with regret for having sold their land so cheaply.

Lee explained about the black gold and handed the contract to Master Liu. "The gold was supposed to be our gift to you," he said. "Please accept the land instead."

Cuddling his beloved grandson on his lap, Master Liu sat silently, deep in thought. Finally he set D.K. in one of the baskets and turned to Yomei. "You and your husband humble me with your generosity. But I cannot accept this gift. Let us donate the land to the people of the village."

Yomei smiled up at her father. "Are you sure?" she asked.

"Yes," Liu replied. "You have already given me the greatest treasure of all—your love and devotion."

From that day on, Master Liu was a changed man. He was no longer snobbish. He helped the poor and took delight in simple pleasures. And he lived happily ever after, along with Yomei, Lee, and his precious grandson.

金玉滿堂
古祥如意
五福臨門

Notes on the Stories

The story "Auntie Tigress" has been popular throughout China for hundreds of years. It may have originated as a tale told by the Hakka people. "The Fisherman and the Tycoon" and "The Greatest Treasure" are stories that originated in the coastal provinces of China, most likely Fujian Province.

While the stories in this book have the universal appeal of all good folktales, they do contain some details that may not be familiar to Western readers.

PAGE 4

In Chinese folklore, there exists a traditional theme of animals and plants that, having lived on Earth for thousands of years, have absorbed the essence of Heaven, Earth, Sun, and Moon and thus develop the ability to transform themselves into human forms. The bad spirits of such animals and plants, like Auntie Tigress, would exploit their morphing powers to prey on humans. The good spirits would long to become part of human society, and would try hard to blend in.

PAGE 6

The Chinese characters on the piece of red paper on the door of MeiMei's house, *Fu*, stand for good fortune. To welcome in the Lunar New Year, the Chinese often paste characters or stanzas calling for good fortune, health, and other wishes on their front doors. These festive decorations would generally stay on until the next New Year.

PAGE 9

The buns shown here are steamed treats made of leavened dough. They may be made without filling or wrapped around meat or sweet ingredients such as red bean paste. Buns and dumplings, as they are frequently referred to in English, are almost interchangeable, but Chinese dumplings often refer to ravioli-like treats made of dough and filled with meat, shrimp, vegetables, or combinations of all three ingredients.

PAGE 21

The distinctive boatlike shape of the gold shown in the chest was the form used for currency in China for centuries. Gold, silver, and tin were cast in this shape in different sizes, each size and metal having a different monetary value.

PAGE 32

Incorporated into the art in the border is the *Shuang Xi* character, which is a combination of two happiness characters commonly used at weddings, birthday banquets, and other joyful occasions.

PAGE 33

In parts of China, snails are considered a delicacy, just like *escargot* in French cuisine. They can be found in fields and along the edges of rice paddies.

PAGE 36

The two posters above the door knockers are portraits of the Guardians of Doors. According to legend, malicious spirits disturbed the sleep of an emperor from the Tang dynasty. His two most trusted generals decided to stand guard outside the palace doors to prevent the spirits from intruding on the emperor's peace. Since then, people have hung paintings of the two generals on their doors to protect their families from evil.

The frame around the text and illustration includes a picture of gourds tied with blue ribbons. Gourds traditionally symbolize good fortune and health. (The Chinese word for *gourd* is a close homonym to *Fu*, the same good-luck character that was pasted on MeiMei's front door.) Gourds were also used by many herbalists to carry and store their medicines, so the gourd image often represents people's wish for a long and healthy life.

PAGE 39

The patch on the boy's head is a homemade bandage. This is traditionally a small piece of cloth with herbal ointment in the center that is used for superficial wounds.

PAGE 40

The two red banners on the sides of the front doors are known as *Chun Lian*, which roughly translates to *springtime stanzas*. These short verses convey wishes for good fortune, good health, etc. Chinese hang these banners just before the Lunar New Year. The stanzas in the illustration are two of the most popular, expressing the hope for "living long lives as the years go by" and "a home filled with joy as spring arrives."

PAGE 42

Incorporated into the art in the border are four traditional Chinese phrases that reflect the celebratory mood and happy ending of the story.

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Gia-Zhen Wang was born on the island of Penghu in the Taiwan Strait. An avid reader as a child, she draws on her early love for exciting stories with surprising twists in the many books she has written for young readers. This is her first book for Purple Bear Books.

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